

Career Path

Making sure it all adds up

by Isabella Lee



Amos Li, assurance principal
Grant Thornton Hong Kong
Photo: Wallace Chan

Job-hopping may have become a trend as opportunities continue to open. However, a seemingly perfect job doesn't necessarily guarantee a life-long career. At the end of the day, it all comes down to a person's acumen and ability to consolidate strengths and experiences. With more than 13 years' auditing experience under his belt, Amos Li doesn't plan on changing careers any time soon. As an assurance principal at Grant Thornton Hong Kong, Mr Li believes that there is plenty of work to keep himself busy for a long time to come.

After graduating from university Mr Li worked for one of the big four accounting firms before moving to a commercial corporation as a financial controller and then to another of the big four. He has been with Grant Thornton for almost two years and believes that his previous work experience at several companies has exposed him to a broad range of industries and different approaches to work and management. "At Grant Thornton, I can get involved in various projects from different capital markets and because of that I can see things from different perspectives. I am always learning something new," he says.

Learning and professional development is a big part of being an auditor as, though the fundamentals of accounting have remained the same for centuries, regulations and compliance standards are changing continuously as systems develop and economies become more interconnected. "Markets change and so must we," Mr Li remarks. "It is essential for us to keep abreast of what is happening."

China change

Some of the biggest changes are occurring on the mainland as corporations seek greater efficiency and transparency in line with international norms. "When I first began my career as an auditor I only dealt with mainland companies on rare occasions," Mr Li says. "That changed in the late 90's when they began to show up in Hong Kong for public listings and that was also the time when people were starting to learn more about auditing and its significance."

Since then the work created by mainland corporations has increased remarkably. "In Hong Kong, mainland corporate clients now constitute a significant portion of most accounting firms' client base," Mr Li estimates, adding that there are still many more Chinese corporations that would like to be listed in Hong Kong and thus a cornucopia of work for auditors. "There is certainly plenty more to do," he says.

"Working from nine to five is just not our style"

Understandably then, Mr Li spends a large part of his time dealing with mainland corporations, helping them become more accessible to overseas interests. "Judging from how these businesses have grown from their early development and matured, many of them are going to become global players. In many cases all they need is a good bridge, or people who have overseas experience, to help them with some potential mergers or acquisitions," he says.

Conversely, Mr Li and his team also act as the first port of call for businesses that want to set up offices on the mainland. "When helping clients establish in China we work closely with other Grant Thornton offices overseas and we can take care of globalisation coordination," he says. "In doing so, there has been much opportunity to practise and polish my problem solving skills."

Ongoing development

Problem solving is more than knowing the best way to present a profit and loss account or which tax rate is most advantageous for a client. It requires understanding the figures, the relevant regulations and the corporation. "This is a challenging profession," Mr Li says. "It's for people who are well-equipped and confident."

Prerequisites for fresh graduates and newcomers, he says, are hard work and devotion. "Working from nine to five is just not our style. For this particular reason, it can be difficult to find the right person." Once that person is located, however, he or she can look forward to a long and rewarding career much like that of Mr Li's. There are also many opportunities for auditors to develop their skills and even to move into other industries, with many company CEOs having an auditing or accounting background.

For Mr Li the future lies with auditing moving towards universal standards under which auditors all around the world can follow the same system and contribute to the overall integrity of the profession. "We believe in the system," he says. "Some people see it as just a game with numbers but it is much more than that to us. It is the idea that ensures every business's finances are looked after and thus that they can continue to run."



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